Building Futures: Believing in children

A focus on provision for Black children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

**department for
children, schools and families**

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- For PC users, double click on My Computer to open it, and then double click on the DVD-ROM icon to open the DVD-ROM.

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Contents

Note: Both parents and carers of children are included in the term 'parent' when used in this booklet.

Building Futures: Believing in children

A focus on provision for Black children in the Early Years Foundation Stage for all practitioners

This guidance invites all practitioners to reflect on the quality of their provision for children of Black African and Black Caribbean heritage or any mixed Black background. Set within the themes and principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), this publication is one of a set of Early Years Foundation Stage materials giving additional guidance on inclusion. By challenging attitudes and asking sometimes difficult questions we aim to encourage practitioners to give due regard to the specific backgrounds and circumstances of all their children, thereby improving the quality of their experiences.

The accompanying DVD can be used alone or with the guidance booklet. It is referred to at certain points in the text to support the discussion activities and to exemplify the experience of settings that are developing effective practice.
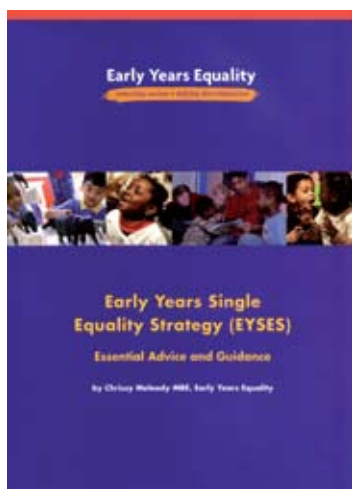
To consider the wider context for equalities, it will be helpful for leaders, managers and practitioners in settings, as well as local authority officers, to refer to the *Early Years Single Equality Strategy* (*Early Years Equality* March 2008)[1]. This publication outlines the steps needed to promote and implement inclusive and anti-discriminatory practice both at setting and local authority level, and is a guide to existing legislation.

1. Meleady, C., *Early Years Single Equality Strategy (EYSES)* Essential advice and guidance, 2008.

What is this booklet about?

The Early Years Foundation Stage statutory guidance states that:

All children, irrespective of ethnicity, culture or religion, home language, family background, learning difficulties or disabilities, gender or ability should have the opportunity to experience a challenging and enjoyable programme of learning and development.

This booklet provides guidance for all practitioners to ensure that this entitlement is met for Black children. It will support and challenge practitioners in their understanding of how stereotyping, negative attitudes and sometimes prejudicial behaviour can unwittingly disadvantage young children of Black African and Black Caribbean heritages and their families.   It is understood that there are likely to be readers who will feel uncomfortable about discussing underachievement of a particular group in terms of practitioner attitude and provision. This is a difficult subject to discuss whatever the ethnic make-up of your setting.

Who are our Black children?

In this guidance, the term Black refers to children of Black Caribbean; Black African; mixed White and Black Caribbean; and mixed White and Black African heritage. These group descriptors, used in the collection and analysis of data for ethnic monitoring purposes, make it possible to assess the impact of strategies settings and local authorities are using to raise Black children's achievement.

The terms Black child or Black children are used in this publication to refer to children with at least one Black parent, grandparent or great grandparent who was born in Africa, the Caribbean or Guyana in South America.

Practitioners should find out about individual children's backgrounds from their families because the various terms used to identify Black children incorporate a range of different heritages, histories, and experiences.

It is important that the multiple influences on children's lives are recognised and acknowledged and that children are not defined by their religion, culture or ethnicity alone. In this way practitioners can begin to break the cycle of cultural stereotyping of Black children and their parents, which can have a negative impact on relationships, expectations and, ultimately, attainment.

Parents and carers of Black children is a term which makes clear that Black children, as defined above, may have parents who are Black or may have one parent who is not Black. In addition, the primary carer for the child might not be the parent and might not be a Black person.

The picture is complex, and as they grow, learn and develop, children may sample or try out different aspects of their identities, switching from one to the other as necessary in their everyday lives.

The definitions above are adapted from *Excellence and Enjoyment: Learning and teaching for Black children in the primary years*, Introductory guide, p 3.

Why focus on provision for Black children?

The Early Years Foundation Stage is a framework that recognises that a child's experience in the early years has a major impact on their future life chances. It aims to provide all those involved with young children 'from birth to five' with the knowledge and understanding they require to support all children in achieving the five Every Child Matters outcomes. It is a framework for excellence, enjoyment and achievement in the early years. At its core is the notion of inclusion and the belief that all children are competent, unique individuals who can and should be provided with the kind of quality care and engaging learning experiences that will ensure they can excel.

The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP)[2] provides a holistic broad-based assessment of children's progress across six areas of learning and development. National Foundation Stage Profile data collected between 2004 and 2007 suggests that too many Black African and Black Caribbean children are doing less well than many of their peers from other ethnic groups across all areas of learning. The 2007 data (below) shows lower scores for children of Black African and Black Caribbean heritages nationally than for 'all children' across the 13 scales.

Mean score by ethnic group
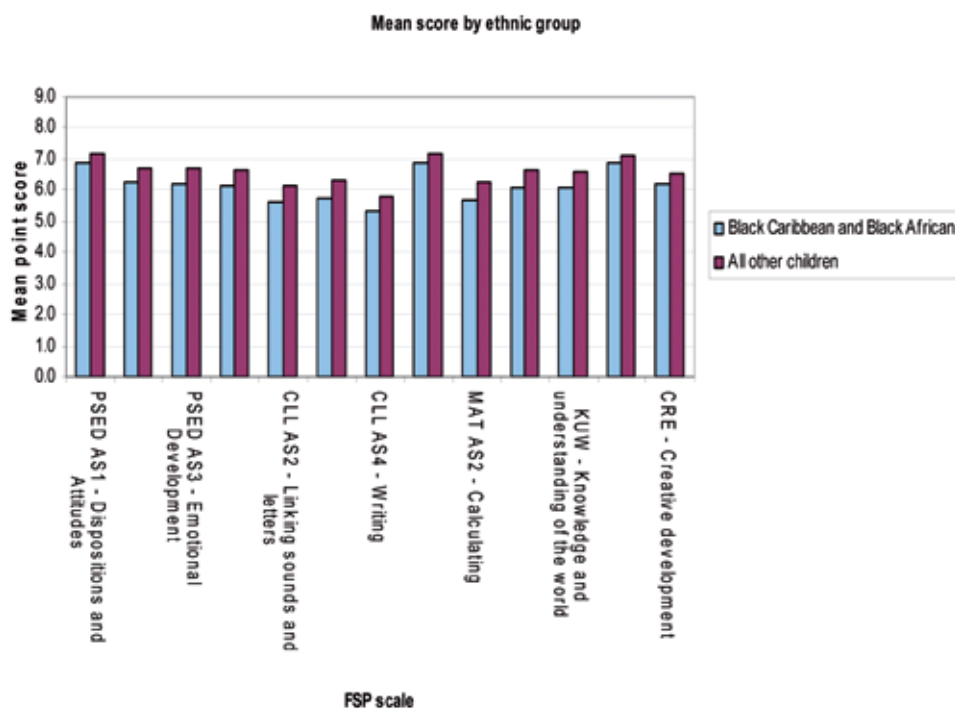
2. The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile is the national statutory instrument used to assess outcomes for young children. It is used as a formative assessment tool from entry to school, and as a summative assessment to inform parents and Key Stage 1 teachers of children's achievements at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The national data sets are derived from the end of key stage formative assessments. Further charts are in Appendix 1.

These early differences in achievement reflect a pattern that may continue into Key Stage 4. Although the gap between the attainment of this diverse group and the national average is beginning to decrease, this is not happening fast enough. The table below suggests that if progress towards narrowing this attainment gap continues at the present rate it will take over 40 years before equity is achieved at the end of Key Stage 2 for both Black African and Black Caribbean children.

Momentum measure: educational attainment

If the achievement of 11-year-olds at Key Stage 2 continues to improve at its current rate of progress, how long will it be before children from these groups close the attainment gap in English and mathematics?

2010	Bangladeshi
2014	Mixed White and Black Caribbean
2017	Pakistani
2025	other Black
2045	Black Caribbean
2053	Black African
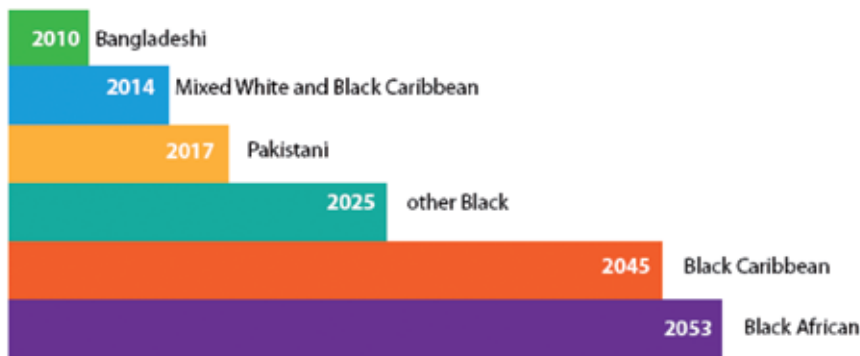
DfES *Fairness and Freedom: The final report of the Equalities Review*, Cabinet Office, 2007

There is no inherent reason why this group of children should do less well than their peers. The apparent early underachievement should be monitored from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards in order to ensure that children make good progress from the start, and that this continues. Waiting for children to begin to fall behind in later key stages before looking at the possible underlying causes is waiting too long.

Why might Black children underachieve?

The long-standing underachievement and lower attainment of Black children relates to the group of Black children in primary schools across the country as a whole. It has to be emphasised that this does not mean that all Black children do not do well enough at school, nor does it mean that Black children do not excel at school.[3]

Black children are not less able than other children but too few excel within our education system and too many fall too far behind their peers; a disproportionate number of Black children, as defined in this document, are underachieving. The reasons for this may be many and complex but we should examine possible causes.

Factors positively and negatively affecting achievement are essentially the same for Black children as for all children. These include the quality of the home learning environment, socio-economic status and the quality of education and care in schools and settings.

There is evidence to suggest that some Black African children are among those more likely to experience a poor quality home-learning environment, as defined by the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) research. What takes place in the home – particularly in relation to parents supporting the learning of their children – can be more influential in producing good educational outcomes than socio-economic status (EPPE research cited in *Fairness and Freedom: The final report of the Equalities Review*, 2007).

We should also consider the quality of Early Years provision. Whilst (increasingly, due to SureStart programmes and Children's Centre initiatives) some of our highest-quality provision in schools and settings can be found in the areas of greatest socio-economic deprivation, some of the least adequate settings are also used by the most vulnerable families. All children are entitled to high-quality care, teaching and

3. *Excellence and Enjoyment: Learning and teaching for Black children in the primary years, Introductory guide*, p 14.

learning experiences and all families are entitled to these experiences. The National Evaluation of SureStart indicates that Black African families are also amongst those least likely to take up their free entitlement to Early Years provision, either through choice, local availability or lack of accessible information.

> *Use of childcare among families in England is generally high. Black and minority ethnic groups are more likely to report insufficient childcare places, rate their satisfaction with quality of care lower, and Black parents more frequently reported that little information was available on childcare.* [4]

> *The Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities (Modood, Berthoud et al., 1997) found that African-Caribbean women not only had the lowest level of free childcare and used childminders relatively more than any other ethnic group, those using childcare paid for all or some of their childcare at a rate (58%) almost twice that of the next highest scoring group.* [5]

When all factors are taken into account, outcomes for Black children should not be any different from those of White children, so perhaps we do need to look at our own attitudes if we are to better understand why Black children are making less progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and beyond. The quality of our relationships with them, the expectations that we have and the values we hold will have an impact on Black children's ability to be confident learners.

Does our planning for Black children build on their own interests and reflect their experiences and family backgrounds?

Reflecting on practice

The Effective Practice guidance on inclusive practice states the following:

- *Inclusion is about attitudes as well as behaviour and practices.*

- *The attitudes of young children towards diversity are affected by the behaviour of adults around them and by whether or not all children and families using the setting are valued and welcomed.*

- *Focused discussion and training are needed to help practitioners and settings consider the nature of discrimination and develop inclusive practice.*

- *Inclusion is not optional: children have defined entitlements in this area and settings have legal responsibilities.*[6]

In order to meet their responsibility to 'ensure positive attitudes' practitioners may need first to examine their own attitudes towards difference and diversity. To remove or help to overcome 'barriers for children' practitioners need to be aware that those barriers, not always obvious or instantly recognisable, exist; particularly if some of those barriers are attitudinal.

Building Futures: Believing in children is for all practitioners, whatever their ethnicity, and recognises the discomfort likely to be felt by any practitioner when discussing their own attitudes and those of each other. However, unless we are able to examine our feelings and attitudes, sensitively but openly, successive generations of children may continue to underachieve, and this cannot be allowed to happen.

4. *Listening to Black and Minority Ethnic Parents about Childcare*, Day Care Trust, 2006
5. *National Evaluation Report: SureStart and Black and minority ethnic populations*, June 2007
6. Further information about responsibilities under the Race Relations Amendment Act can be found in appendix 2.

Reference to and extracts from the primary materials *Excellence and Enjoyment: Learning and teaching for Black children in the primary years* will be used throughout this document; Early Years Foundation Stage practitioners in schools and those with a particular interest in the achievement of Black children will find these materials helpful.
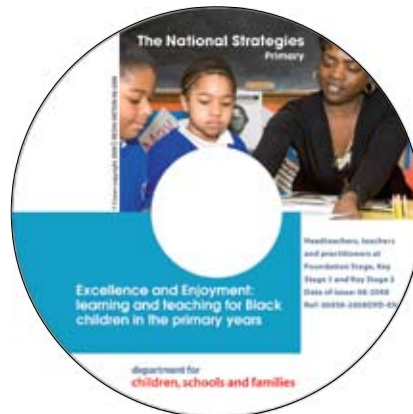
What do practitioners need to do?

Practitioners should never underestimate the influence they can have on the lives of children and families. Whilst the role of setting leaders and managers is vital for policy change, all practitioners have a responsibility to reflect on their own practice and can:

- ensure that they provide a learning environment in which Black children and their families feel welcomed, respected and valued;

- enter into genuine partnerships with parents of Black children by creating a space for dialogue – listening to the voices of Black children and their parents;

- provide a rich learning environment with relevant, appropriate, creative and challenging learning opportunities;

- recognise that good teaching is a vital ingredient in achievement and ensure that Black children experience good role models in all areas of learning and development;

- keep careful records to track children's progress from entry to the setting, ensuring that expectations and progress of Black children is in line with other groups and investigating possible causes where variance arises;

- consider assessment procedures – are observational assessments of Black children fair, honest and free from influences of stereotyping?

- reflect honestly on personal attitudes, feelings, preconceptions and tendencies to stereotype;

- examine their own attitudes and awareness and reflect on those of their colleagues, co-workers and community;

- challenge negative attitudes and practice within the setting (this is both possible and necessary);

- make race equality training a priority for whole-setting professional development;

- review and implement, monitor and evaluate their race equality policy.

Practitioners are advised to refer to Appendices 2 and 3 to consider race equality.

Further guidance on assessing the learning needs of Black children and planning for learning can be found in Appendix 4.

Using the Early Years Foundation Stage principles to inform and develop practice

The Early Years Foundation Stage clearly establishes four overarching principles based on the themes Unique Child, Positive Relationships, Enabling Environments, and Learning and Development. These principles inform our thinking and practice in order to meet all young children's entitlement to rich and engaging learning experiences.

These principles have been used on the following pages as a framework to support practitioners and settings in reflecting on evaluating and developing their practice. Each section has a case study that is an example of practice supporting the learning and achievement of Black children in the Early Years Foundation Stage; suggestions for effective practice; possible challenges and dilemmas; and questions for reflection.

A Unique Child

Early Years Foundation Stage principle: Every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured

Commitments

1.1 Child development: Babies and children develop in individual ways and at varying rates. Every area of development – physical, cognitive, linguistic, spiritual, social and emotional – is equally important.

1.2 Inclusive practice: The diversity of individuals and communities is valued and respected. No child or family is discriminated against.

1.3 Keeping safe: Young children are vulnerable. They develop resilience when their physical and psychological well-being is protected by adults.

1.4 Health and well-being: Children's health is an integral part of their emotional, mental, social, environmental and spiritual well-being and is supported by attention to these aspects.

Use the Principles into Practice Cards for 'A Unique Child' to think about your provision in relation to Black children.

All children are unique individuals who develop in individual ways. However it is all too easy to stereotype Black children, even if this process is subconscious. Children very quickly pick up our views of what we expect from them and will often express these views themselves.

It is effective practice to 'encourage children to talk about their own home and community life, and to find out about other children's experiences'. It is equally helpful to provide the tools for children, staff and parents to 'understand why people do things differently from each other and…to talk about these differences'. It is these differences that make each child unique.

Many young Black children might be learning English as an additional language (EAL), particularly if they have recently arrived in England. Typically, many African families record English as their first language even if there are other languages and dialects spoken at home with which children are more familiar.

Whether born in the Caribbean or not, for some children of Caribbean heritage the influence of Creoles or Patois in speech patterns, language use and grammar may be strong but the significance of this might not be recognised by schools or settings.

To give a name to a language is to recognise and accept its use; this is a key part of a child's identity. Schools will benefit from finding ways to help families name additional languages and explore and celebrate their use in the learning environment.

The linguistic profile of some Black children is very complex and practitioners will need to understand the range of influences on children's language development. Helpful guidance is provided in *Excellence and Enjoyment: Learning and teaching for Black children in the primary years,* Unit 2B, section 1, and *Supporting Children Learning English as an Additional Language: Guidance for practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage.*
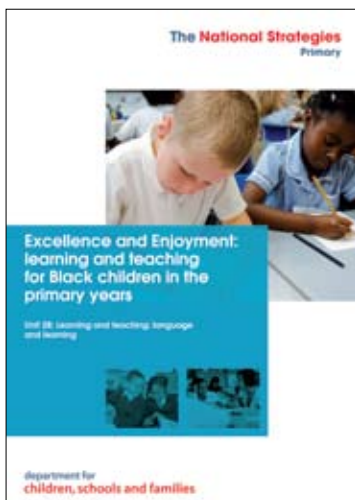
They (Somali parents) would be more happy (with Somali childcare workers) because of language and culture. Settings should provide at least one worker. If you take a little girl to a lady who is speaking English, she will be frightened…They need to speak Somali and English.

Worker speaking on behalf of Somali new immigrants, Greenwich, London.[7]

As adults, we sometimes forget the power we have to shape young children's lives. We can fill children's lives with warmth and wonder. We can astonish children. We can help children to create worlds within our world – to explore, develop and learn.

How beautiful and perfect a child appears to their parent, and how distressing then when that perfect child feels like they do not belong and the parent remembers that same pain.

You are so perfect

Your winter coat buttons itself and hugs your heart

Library books unfurl on tables, stretch

And wait for you to walk past.

From '*Perfect*' by Lemn Sissay.

When practitioners and parents work together to celebrate a Unique Child and help them feel good about being who they are, they can watch them grow as they find new confidence.

7. *Listening to Black and Minority Ethnic Parents about Childcare*, Daycare Trust 2007.

Case study

Keysia

Keysia was the only Black girl in her Reception class. The large infant school on the outskirts of a mill town in the north serves a population where very few of the community are from Black backgrounds. Practitioners became very concerned when her pupil attitude and self-esteem survey (PASS) revealed that Keysia didn't like going to school. This was especially worrying as the other children's surveys were all very positive about school, so the class teacher decided to invite her mother in, to see if they could identify the problems.

At first Keysia said that she didn't like dinnertime because she was separated from her sister, but when asked if there was anything else, she said that she didn't like not being like the other girls. This prompted her mother to tell the class teacher about a bath-time incident that had worried her. Keysia had been scrubbing ferociously at the skin on her hands and when asked why she was rubbing so hard, had replied that she was trying to wash the black off. Keysia's mother remembered that she had had exactly the same feelings as a young girl.

The school started to work with the mother to find ways to improve Keysia's self-esteem and to make school a happier place for her. It was about this time that the school was invited to join the Black Children's Achievement (BCA) pilot project.

Keysia's mother also began to help in school; this provided Keysia with a positive role model and made her feel special. Her mother's presence helped to raise her self-esteem as she was so proud of her being in the classroom.

Keysia had also said that she would love to have long hair, so her mother, who had hair extensions, allowed her and her sister to have them too. Although some family members felt strongly that she should just get used to her hair the way it was, Keysia's mother thought that it was important to show her that you can change your hair if you want to. Keysia enjoyed swishing her plaits and choosing ribbons and clips. At the same time her mother told her all the ways that she was beautiful and involved her in skin-care and hair-care discussions.

School staff made a conscious effort to remark positively on Keysia's appearance and this was soon taken up by the other children. Activities and lessons were made more relevant to Black children and the Personal, Social and Emotional Development part of the curriculum concentrated on celebrating differences and encouraging children to see what was good about themselves. Displays and images around the school featured more Black people. Staff committed to improving their practice and attended an 'Introduction to Black Studies' course. They were then able to bring their expertise back into school.

Keysia's confidence grew over the next two years. She had been to Jamaica and could speak Creole; now, she was often the expert. After working on 'Childhood Tracks', a poem by James Berry, Keysia said, 'It reminds me of my family. I was very proud that I could tell people what some of the things were.' A class-mate said, 'Keysia spoke some Jamaican language, we liked it. We learned about Jamaica and the food there. Keysia helped. It made her proud.' Keysia began to show leadership qualities and, when she was chosen as a playground friend leader, showed great nurturing skills. Her PASS survey at the end of Year 2 showed she had a positive self-image and a huge enthusiasm for school life.

Keysia's story not only affected the way that the staff dealt with other Black children in the school, but reminded them how important individual concerns are for every child and this helped to drive the whole personalisation programme forward.

Pause for reflection and discussion 1

Keysia's story is not as rare as we would like to think. Perhaps you have your own experience of this situation – if so, are you prepared to share this with colleagues?

How does this story make you feel?

How would you know if this was the experience of a child in your setting? Are you confident that a parent or child would be able to share this with you?

Think about how the school found out about Keysia's sense of self-identity.

This story highlights the importance of listening to the voice of the child. What mechanisms do you have in place for listening to children and tuning in to what they are feeling?

How would you have responded in a similar situation?

What do you think about the school's response?

What else might they have done?

How do you think you would have responded:

• as an individual?

• as a staff team?

Additional examples of effective practice are available on the disc in the A Unique Child section.

A Unique Child

Effective practice

Practitioners are effective when they:

- support babies and children to have a positive self-image;

- encourage children to recognise their own unique qualities and the characteristics they share with other children;

- recognise that babies' and children's attitudes and dispositions to learning are influenced by feedback from others;

- start from children's strengths, interests and learning preferences by observing, listening and tuning into each child as an individual;

- find out how children play at home and value different approaches to play;

- react when children exclude each other because of race, by supporting the excluded child and addressing these issues with all the children. Practitioners can help children to challenge stereotypes themselves by discussing the children's views with them using Persona Dolls (see References for more details) and stories;

- make time to get to know and learn from each other;

- actively promote equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that all children and families feel included, safe and valued.

Challenges and dilemmas

- To remember that children learn from everything they experience, including stereotypes and prejudice.

- To understand that our behaviours towards children can impact negatively as well as positively on their self-esteem.

- To treat all children and babies with equal care, concern and tenderness when family expectations and behaviours can be very different from your own.

- To make time to listen to children and give them space to express their feelings individually in all types of setting.

Reflecting on practice

- Are practitioners aware of how babies and children are affected by their behaviour?

- How is each child's individual development supported by the setting? Are resources and displays full of positive images that acknowledge and celebrate diversity?

- Think about each child in the group. Consider their:

  - unique development;

  - individual interests;

  - communication styles;

  - learning styles.

Positive Relationships

Early Years Foundation Stage principle: Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person

Commitments

2.1 Respecting each other: Every interaction is based on caring professional relationships and respectful acknowledgement of the feelings of children and their families.

2.2 Parents as partners: Parents are children's first and most enduring educators. When parents and practitioners work together in Early Years settings, the results have a positive impact on children's development and learning.

2.3 Supporting learning: Warm, trusting relationships with knowledgeable adults support children's learning more effectively than any amount of resources.

2.4 Key person: A key person has special responsibilities for working with a small number of children, giving them the reassurance to feel safe and cared for and building relationships with their parents.

Use the Principles into Practice Cards for 'Positive Relationships' to think about your provision in relation to Black children.

This Early Years Foundation Stage principle focuses on the importance to children's learning and development of Positive Relationships and an ethos of mutual respect and trust. The quality of these relationships is critical: positive close and loving relationships are important in providing a secure base for a child to flourish.

The youngest children in our schools and settings may not always have the words to express their concerns, so adults are usually the conduits for and interpreters of what children need and how they are feeling. This is a crucial role for parents and for practitioners – real understanding and strong relationships between the adults will usually result in children going willingly to the school or setting and being free to learn well.[8]

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8. A useful additional resource, which can be used productively alongside these materials, is the Teachers' TV video, 'Positive relationships', www.teachers.tv/video/27031.

Successful relationships become partnerships when there is two-way communication and parents and practitioners really listen to each other and value each other's views and support in achieving the best outcomes for each child.

Early Years Foundation Stage 2.2 Positive Relationships, parents as partners

Some parents of Black children might have had a negative experience of the British education system and may be aware of the lack of empowerment or influence their own families felt. Where you know that this is likely, make sure to take these experiences into account as you build new relationship with parents: take the time to explain what is happening and why – this should make misunderstandings less likely. Practitioners should take a lead in ensuring that parents of Black children are fully included.

Listening to parents and children, creating and sustaining opportunities for meaningful dialogue and being prepared to show that you are worthy of trust takes time, effort and a genuine belief that it will make a difference. Building sustainable relationships with families is essential to improving outcomes for the children.

Schools and settings are not home and have a great variety of profiles. Some Black children will be entering a setting where a large number of children and staff are also Black and of similar heritage to the children; others may be entering a setting where for the first time most of the adults they encounter are White. What impact does this have for Black children, their self-identity and their achievements? Research and consultation indicates that some families may have more confidence in settings where there are Black members of staff; children may feel the same, or absorb those feelings from parents. Views on cultural and language issues vary a great deal between parents. For many parents, having a childcare setting that understands their language and culture is an important consideration when making childcare choices.

Me personally if I went to a nursery and it was all White I wouldn't (use it)…It's just the fact that if, I can't even explain it but I just know that personally I would not feel comfortable and I think there need to be other ethnic origins around you – people from other ethnic origins working where my child is going to be cared for – also I don't know if they can kind of relate to me and my child in a certain way…

Black Caribbean parent, Birmingham. [9]

Most children are used to one or two principal care givers with a small number of siblings competing for attention. A key person in the setting or school can enable children to settle into their new environment and help them to make good progress. This is especially important in the early years if we are to consolidate what children learn so that they can build on a firm base in later years.

Forging initial relationships

Schools need to know the prior experience of their intake into nursery or reception classes in order to effectively meet their needs. Home visiting can be an effective way of forging good relationships with families and increasing understanding. It does, however, need to be approached with sensitivity and an understanding that not everyone will feel comfortable with their child's school teacher visiting their home. Some families will welcome the opportunity to display their hospitality and share aspects of their culture; this is as individual as the families. Where this is not an option, there should be opportunities for children and families to become familiar with the school setting and meet practitioners prior to entry. Settings need to ensure that family aspirations and values are shared.

9. From *Listening to Black and Minority Ethnic Parents about Daycare, Daycare* Trust, 2007.

It is at this key point of transition, from home to setting, that early disaffection may begin, particularly if parents and children's expectations are not met and they feel they have no voice in the setting. Parents and children need to understand the language codes of the school or setting. These initial cultural exchanges between home and setting are of key importance to successful transition and transfer.

> *We place a great deal of emphasis on our transition procedures. Starting right from entry into nursery or reception classes. With a strong involvement in home visits, where the staff are able to make a connection straight away with the family. We have an open day, and on that open day we try to provide translators for parents who might struggle a little bit with understanding fully what we are saying, or being able to fill in the correct forms. It also means they have the opportunity to be able to talk with us about issues or all concerns that they have got. We have found that, through involving these processes, we have been able to have much smoother induction of children into the nursery and reception classes.* [10]

> *Ruth, Headteacher, inner-city school in area of high socio-economic deprivation.*

Developing partnerships with parents

When parents value themselves as their children's first teachers and have the confidence to support their children's learning in a genuine partnership with practitioners, outcomes for children can be seen to improve.

Several local authorities have used funding from the Parents as Partners in Early Learning (PPEL)[11] to enhance and extend their work with families. The following example is from Southwark where Black African, Caribbean and Bangladeshi families were the focus for support. In this case study, we report specifically on the work with Black African and Caribbean families.

10. See also '*Open Day*' PowerPoint from Seamless Transition (Ref: 0267-2006PCK-EN).
11. Southwark along with 41 other local authorities received funding for one year from the DCSF to participate in a pilot project '*Parents as Partners in Early Learning*' aimed at improving parent-practitioner partnerships and supporting parental involvement in their children's early learning.

Case study

Working with parents: Parents as Partners in Early Learning (PPEL)

As Sonia dropped her child Enzo off at her nursery on Monday morning, the centre manager greeted her and asked how the 'Understanding Schemas'[12] course had gone on Saturday.

> 'Oh it was great. We talked about our children's different play and behaviour patterns and I found out that Enzo is an envelope!' 'Aahh, Yes!', the manager responded, 'He is an enveloper – he loves wrapping things and covering things – I have noticed that about him too!'

Sonia was one of 17 Black African and Caribbean parents from a local Children's Centre and the nearby Early Years Centre who had signed up to do a seven-week course on Saturday mornings linked to the Parents as Partners in Early Learning project (PPEL) in Southwark. Staff from the two centres attended parallel training in supporting children's Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED). This simple exchange between parent and practitioner demonstrates the shared observations and learning that took place during the one-year programme.

Black African and Caribbean parents were targeted particularly because the local authority's analysis of children's outcomes had found that Black boys were starting Key Stage 1 in school with few if any early learning goals in social, emotional, communication, language and literacy development.

> We wanted to give parents from this community the confidence and skills to support their children's early language and communications skills, to understand their behaviours and develop their interests through providing opportunities to play.

> We also wanted to support practitioners to develop greater understanding and confidence when working in partnership with parents from different ethnic groups.

The parent programme included:

- an introduction to schemas, linking them to child development and well-being;

- schemas and social interaction;

- linking 'being social' to everyday life experiences and looking at how parents and children relate to and understand others;

- looking at ten schemas in depth;

- exploring how individual children learn through exploring play patterns;

- looking at how children express their feelings and relationships through their play and exploration.

Photograph of Schemas Workshop © Southwark Council 2008. All Rights Reserved. Used with kind permission.

12. Schemas are patterns of repeated behaviour noticeable in children's play. Understanding the schemas children are using helps practitioners and parents learn about their developing interests and behaviour, creating additional opportunities to extend and build on their learning. A helpful description of schemas can be found on Dorset local authority's website, www.dorsetforyou.com, use search facility to search for 'schemas'.

The parallel courses for practitioners included:

- personal, social, and emotional development – aspects of babies' and young children's development and learning;

- being social – listening effectively to babies and young children;

- being close – qualities and attitudes of the key person;

- being me – getting to know babies and young children;

- schemas;

- having feelings – encouragement, limits and consistency;

- having friends and relationships – working together.

At the end of each seven-week course, a celebration event brought parents and practitioners together to share their learning and plan together how they wanted to take it forward in their centres. These celebrations were a real confirmation of the learning and new confidence felt by parents, and the growing sensitivity and commitment of practitioners to continue to develop ways of working in real partnership with parents.

How did parents respond?

Melissa, a parent, described how her knowledge and understanding of schemas had helped her to support, extend and redirect her son's play and exploration. Melissa talked openly about her change in attitude towards her son and her new understanding about what she had initially perceived to be naughty behaviour that was, in fact, schematic. One example she gave was linked to her son's exploration of rotation both at home and at the children's centre. She described how he had destroyed two video players because of his fascination with the reels inside the machine. Now she understands why he does it, she enjoys the challenge of providing him with resources and activities at home, such as wheels and strips of material and string, that he can wind round old cotton reels and pieces of wood to support his interest in and exploration of rotation.

How did the practitioners respond?

The practitioners felt that knowledge of children's schemas informed their observations and planning and that they were able to be more responsive to the children. They began to share information with parents relating to particular behaviours that children would display when they were feeling emotional. Parents and practitioners shared strategies on extending and re-directing play and exploration. Parents were finding it much easier to describe schematic behaviours displayed by their children at home; they were sharing these observations with practitioners. Both centres are delighted with the way that parents and staff have embraced schemas as a way of understanding and sharing observations about the children's play and behaviour.

A continuing programme of training for parents and practitioners is being delivered, with parents being engaged as mentors and evaluators of the programme, to help embed the principles of communication, engagement and involvement of parents in the early years of their children's lives in Southwark.

Pause for reflection and discussion 2

Think about what was offered to the parents and what was offered to the practitioners.

What do you think made these courses so successful?

How do you think the courses helped parents and practitioners to strengthen their relationships with:

- the children?
- each other?

How do you support parents to understand their children's learning development?

What are your priorities, as an individual or as a setting, for professional development in working with parents?

Think about the professional development priorities you have now and how these will impact on outcomes for the Black children in your setting.

Additional examples of effective practice are available on the disc in the Positive Relationships section.

Case study

Developing Positive Relationships through PSED

When one large primary school in the North of England joined the Black Children's Achievement programme, practitioners used the 'Relationships' unit of work from the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) materials to enhance their provision for Black children in the Foundation Stage.

Puppets were introduced to support this unit of work about exploring feelings. Black puppets were chosen for the first time specifically to stimulate the learning and emotional engagement of the Black children. It was felt that this might help them to more readily relate the work to their own experiences.

Photographs of Puppet buddies © The Puppet Company Ltd. Used with kind permission

The puppets were used to build stories with which the children could interact and to which they could bring ideas and experiences of their own. The teacher created a life story around each puppet, giving them credible personalities and backgrounds. [13] The boy puppet, Peter, lived in the local area; the girl, Cherry, was introduced as Peter's cousin from Jamaica.

The children were captivated by the puppets from the outset; they were drawn into the lives of 'Peter' and 'Cherry' and completely engaged.

Practitioners were able to extend the children's knowledge of the world through introducing Cherry. They used the opportunity to find out more about Jamaica and the Caribbean Islands. Maps and other resources were used to introduce Jamaica to the children and help them understand where it was. They learned about the climate, clothes, food, employment and schools, and were able to draw on some children's personal knowledge and experience of the Caribbean through sharing Cherry's and Peter's stories.

Assessment outcomes after the first week were extremely positive; engagement levels of the Black children in the group were high. Practitioners responded to the outcomes of their observations by extending the use of the puppets.

The puppets took on personalities and were welcome visitors. The children were able to model and rehearse positive behaviour in order to teach their new friends the ways of the setting. They showed the puppets how to take turns, when to speak during circle times and how to sit and listen to the teacher, thus reinforcing their own learning. The children were able to show their visitors around the setting, take them for outdoor play, a picnic in the woods, go with them into assembly and to meet visitors with them and generally involve them in the life of the school – becoming confident experts as they did so.

13. Creating a credible persona for a doll or a puppet is a skill – it is very easy to reinforce stereotypes. Advice and training is available, and sources are recommended in the Further reading section.

Photographs of Puppet buddies © The Puppet Company Ltd. Used with kind permission

One child was motivated to offer his own expertise about Cherry's Caribbean life-style. He had told his parents about what was happening in school and then brought in photographs of a family holiday to the Caribbean to show Cherry and the rest of his class. This extended the questioning skills and the learning opportunities for all the children in the class and increased the 'expert' child's confidence.

Parents responded positively and were keen to learn about the Black puppets. Some parents commented that their children 'were thrilled to have these puppets in their class'.

The use of the puppets in the Foundation Stage to enhance and extend the PSED area of learning was a successful part of this whole-school strategy. The school went on to develop parental input further by encouraging parents to share their cultural experiences in school with the children.

Pause for reflection and discussion 3

The use of puppets and Persona Dolls is increasingly popular.

Do you think it is important to have puppets or dolls that reflect the ethnicity of the children in your setting?

How comfortable would you feel using resources like these?

How can you avoid stereotypes and getting into difficult situations with children's questions and observations?

How can you ensure all children feel included and engage with the stories built around these resources?

How do you think relationships in this school, between children, parents, staff and the wider community, were enhanced through this work?

How do you think all the children may have benefitted?

Positive Relationships

Effective practice

Practitioners are effective when they:

- respect and value every child's family and home background, their cultures and communities and the important events in their lives;

- work closely with parents and families, developing mutual understanding of how Black African and Black Caribbean heritage children play and the importance of building on children's interests;

- know or find out about the community and local dynamics;

- involve fathers and mothers in drawing up policies, for example on learning and development, inclusion and behaviour;

- take time to listen to people from different backgrounds and are open about differences of language and approach;

- make time to listen to parents and their feelings and concerns;

- ensure parents have regular opportunities to add to children's records;

- ask parents for their views on the care and education they provide.

Challenges and dilemmas

- To maintain a respectful dialogue with parents or other professionals whose views about behaviour or child-rearing differ from your own.

- To maintain a professional distance from parents while working in close partnership with them.

- To find sufficient time to involve parents fully in decisions made about their children.

- To value the play of all children, even those who base their play on themes with which you are unfamiliar.

Reflecting on practice

- Do all practitioners feel that they know all the Black children in their key group of children as well as the other children? What can be done to improve this?

- Do all families of Black children know that they are welcomed and valued? How do you know?

- What do we find out about Black African and Black Caribbean children from their parents? How do they contribute to children's profiles?

Enabling Environments

Early Years Foundation Stage principle: The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning

Commitments

3.1 Observation, assessment and planning: Babies and children are individuals first, each with a unique profile of abilities. Schedules and routines should flow with the child's needs. All planning starts with observing children in order to understand and consider their current interests, development and learning.

3.2 Supporting every child: The environment supports every child's learning through planned experiences and activities that are challenging but achievable.

3.3 The learning environment: A rich and varied environment supports children's learning and development. It gives them confidence to explore and learn in secure and safe, yet challenging, indoor and outdoor spaces.

3.4 The wider context: Working in partnership with other settings, other professionals and with individuals and groups in the community supports children's development and progress towards the outcomes of Every Child Matters: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and economic well-being.

Use the Principles into Practice Cards for 'Enabling Environments' to think about your provision in relation to Black children.

The types of play that children engage in is enhanced or diminished by the quality of the learning environment both inside and outside. Children and adults alike are affected by their environment; spaces, colours, arrangements of objects, sights, sounds and smells and the behaviours of those around us all contribute to how we feel, react, interact, communicate and learn. The notion of the environment as the 'third teacher', a key part of the approach used by the early childhood educators of Reggio Emilia,[14] has had a major impact on provision and practice in this country. The environment as a teacher has the potential for children to learn from it as well as within it and about it, and about themselves. Through this process we need to be sure that we are fully aware of how the environment 'speaks' to Black children and their families.

14. The Reggio Approach derives its name from its place of origin, Reggio Emilia, a city located in Northern Italy. Shortly after the Second World War, Loris Malaguzzi, a young teacher and the founder of this unique system, joined forces with the parents of this region to provide child care for young children. This education system has caught the attention of early childhood educators worldwide; many books and articles have been inspired by the work of the Nursery Centres of Reggio and the work of the late Loris Malaguzzi. A web or library search will reveal a wealth of information for interested practitioners.

Application of the principle and commitments of this theme to the learning and development needs of Black children will help practitioners to create environments that will nurture, nourish, encourage and extend their learning and development.

The Principles into Practice Cards and Effective practice extended guidance remind us of the importance of the emotional environment to children's social and emotional development and that it will influence their motivation and capacity to learn and achieve. Children learn best when they feel safe, secure and supported as well as excited and motivated. The learning environment should be a place where children feel confident, so that they are willing to try things out. Seeing themselves and things familiar to them will help them to feel confident and secure. Within the learning environment it is important to ensure that materials reflect and acknowledge diversity, and that stereotypical images and approaches are avoided.

It is important to ensure that all Black children, especially Black boys, are able to make a positive start to their school careers. For many Black children this positive start occurs because of the strong foundation for learning set down in the home and then the combined, additional support from school and community. Some children, especially those from areas of social and economic disadvantage, will require support if they are to become and to remain safe from potential harm. Security and safety will allow them the space to explore and grow as learners and will do much to change the consequences for some of those young Black people for whom educational failure leads to social exclusion and worse.

Case study

Supporting all our children and families through our commitment to sustainable development

At a Forest school in the north of England, the mission statement shared with parents annually emphasises the need to 'serve all our children well'. The school has ambitions for all its children and families and is strongly influenced by the vision for sustainable development, defined within three 'commitments of care':

- care for oneself;

- care for each other (across cultures, distances and generations);

- care for the environment (near and far) [15].

The school posed itself a question linking the philosophy of sustainable schools to their provision for Black children and their families.

> How do the three C's translate themselves into practice that supports and extends the development of our Black African and Black Caribbean children?

The school decided that the keystone is respect – respect for personal identities. The school felt that for a young child to feel acknowledged, the parent needs to feel acknowledged too.

This meant planning to implement some specific strategies to involve and welcome parents, particularly those who might find the Forest School's approach to education a challenging one.

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15. DfES *Sustainable Schools* (Ref: 04231-2006LEF-EN).

They planned to set about:

- ensuring the school is 'known' by the wider school community through participation in community events, for example the local carnival, and by using local shops, sports facilities and the mobile library;

- providing opportunities to create a welcoming image of the school by ensuring children, parents and carers see us 'around and about';

- ensuring that the ethnic diversity of the school staff is visible because parents told us that seeing adults from similar ethnic backgrounds gives them confidence that their child's culture will be understood;

- developing opportunities for a range of events reflecting worldwide cultural diversity to take place at the school;

- providing opportunities for face-to-face contact:
  - in the home, if the family feels comfortable about this;
  - in school, for special events even before the child joins;

- taking the lead from the parents about what the children enjoy doing, what is special to them, preferred names and so on, so that as far as possible the transition from home to Early Years Foundation Stage is gentle.

All staff understood that they needed to be sensitive to parents' questions, concerns, and own past experiences of school. Black heritage families were actively encouraged to visit the Early Years provision several times before their children started so that the adults also understood the 'language' of school, the routines, how the days are organised, what happens at the start of the day, lunchtime, how to add to the learning journey records and so on. The members of staff were prepared to hear things that didn't sit well with what they believed and saw this challenge as an opportunity to develop greater understanding. The school provided opportunities for parent ambassadors, who may, for example, understand Creole or Patois, to 'buddy' new arrivals and help them to settle in.

Pause for reflection and discussion 4

This school had a particular commitment to sustainability and a commitment to ensuring this would support the achievements of their Black children.

Does your setting have clear values and commitments?

How do you ensure the values, commitments and ethos of your setting are reflected in your provision for Black children?

How do you communicate your values to parents and children?

This school is a Forest School in a Northern town; your setting may be urban, rural, in a church hall, a large primary school, children's centre, day nursery or your own home – how do you include the wider community to improve your environment for the children?

Has this case study given you any new ideas, for example would you consider 'buddying' for new parents?

What might this look like in practice? How would it work?

Case study

Making our role-play area more relevant to Black children

At the Forest School a further stimulus for change was the Learning Walk [16], an environmental audit undertaken by schools participating in the Black Children's Achievement programme. The audit identified that role-play opportunities could be further enhanced by being more culturally diverse.

The school then took action:

- Medium-term planning was enhanced through collaborative work with a 'critical friend' who was knowledgeable about African and Caribbean cultures.

- Whole-staff training extended understanding of African and Caribbean cultures well enough to be able to identify and counter stereotyping and avoid being Eurocentric.

- Some family members of African and Caribbean heritage children accepted an invitation to enhance the travel agent's role-play area by sharing their own experiences of planning and booking, recalling a holiday to see relatives in Grenada, etc. They provided artefacts including maps, items of clothing, music enjoyed, currency, recipes, and photographs of relatives, accommodation, food, gatherings and places of interest.

16. *Excellence and Enjoyment: Learning and teaching for Black children in the primary years* – an e-learning module, Learning Walk – an audit of the whole school environment.

Parents who had enjoyed planning the role-play area were then motivated to contribute to the children's learning journeys. Inspired by these opportunities, some parents really looked forward to adding to the records. This helped staff teams to look at children's needs holistically and encouraged parents to participate more in their children's achievements.

A number of things happened as a result of these changes.

- Black children's engagement in the role-play improved.

- Involvement levels measured by Effective Early Learning (EEL) rating were higher.

- Children and parents of Black children were motivated to share their expertise and helped to review the benefits of the role-play environment.

- Parents' understanding of the benefits of high-quality play as a learning tool increased.

- Children identified greater happiness levels using the 'Smileometer', which recorded their mood changes.

- Black adult attendance during the school's 'Learn Together Week' and 'Bring a Man to School Week' was higher after the role-play involvement.

- Increased pride and confidence was visible in both children and adults.

Knowing the children and families well means that practitioners are better equipped to support each child's learning journey through school and therefore give them the best start possible. Children are viewed as individuals as well as members of different groups. Diversity is not only valued but celebrated, giving all community members a clear message that they really do matter to us.

Pause for reflection and discussion 5

Have you looked closely at your provision to ensure that it is relevant to and reflects all the children in your setting?

Are there any aspects or features of your practice that any parents might find difficult to see the relevance of?

When you look around, who is reflected in your setting? Are the images positive?

Have you walked around your setting and tried to look at it as if you were a parent of a Black child?

How do you ensure that your learning environment reflects the lifestyles, ethnicities and cultural heritages of the families you serve?

What language does your environment speak? How well does it represent the ethos you want to portray?

How do you make sure your role-play areas are relevant to all your children?

What have you observed about the way your Black children use the role-play area?

How do you involve children in planning the role-play?

What improvements could you make that would enhance learning opportunities inside and outside for Black children?

Additional examples of effective practice are available on the disc in the Enabling Environments section.

Enabling Environments

Effective practice

Practitioners are effective when they:

- are aware of the impact of both the emotional and physical environment on the well-being and self-esteem of all children;

- involve themselves in Black African and Black Caribbean heritage children's choices of play;

- think creatively about the environment, experiences and activities they have on offer to ensure they meet the needs of Black children;

- ensure role-play areas incorporate play themes that engage Black children;

- share different artefacts, foods, music and clothes, and talk about each other's practices, habits and rituals;

- carefully monitor how Black children use both the indoor and outdoor environment.

Challenges and dilemmas

- To ensure that the whole staff team agrees on a similar approach to valuing, respecting and working with Black children.

- To ensure the provision reflects the experience and interests of the children and families.

- To truly incorporate families' practices, habits, and rituals into the everyday provision and routines without them becoming a novelty.

Reflecting on practice

- How does the environment support children's independent choices to follow up their own interests with and without adult support?

- How well do staff know the local area and use this knowledge in planning for children's learning?

- Does the provision meet the needs of all children as both a place to feel at home and a place to learn?

Learning and Development

Early Years Foundation Stage principle: Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of learning and development are equally important and interconnected

Commitments

4.1 Play and exploration: Children's play reflects their wide-ranging and varied interests and preoccupations. In their play children learn at their highest level. Play with peers is important for children's development.

4.2 Active learning: Children learn best through physical and mental challenges. Active learning involves other people, objects, ideas and events that engage and involve children for sustained periods.

4.3 Creativity and critical thinking: When children have opportunities to play with ideas in different situations and with a variety of resources, they discover connections and come to new and better understandings and ways of doing things. Adult support in this process enhances their ability to think critically and ask questions.

4.4 Areas of learning and development: The Early Years Foundation Stage is made up of six areas of learning and development. All areas of learning and development are connected to one another and are equally important. All areas of learning and development are underpinned by the principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Use the Principles into Practice Cards for 'Learning and Development' to think about your provision in relation to Black children.

The commitments linked to the principle of Learning and Development help us to understand how children learn actively through play, first-hand experiences, creativity and critical thinking. The framework recognises that different cultural approaches to play and learning may cause some misunderstandings between children, practitioners and parents if they are not fully thought through and understood.

Practitioners may find themselves having to explain progress or achievements in areas that are not necessarily valued by parents. There can be few practitioners who have not witnessed a cherished piece of work being dismissed as rubbish, questioned, or binned by a parent who cannot initially see the value of it and was not there to see the process involved in its production. Children learn to value what the significant adults in their lives value and it is important that parents understand the impact of their opinions and actions on children's chosen ways of self-expression and learning.

This is by no means an issue specific to parents of Black children, but conveying all we now know about the benefits of a creative and play-based approach to learning without appearing dismissive of some parents' values can be a challenge. It requires the evidence of skilful, effective practice as well as sound knowledge of and commitment to the pedagogy of play.

Research for the *Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project (EPPE)*[17] has now confirmed the centrality of play in early learning. The project concludes that there needs to be an appropriate balance of adult-directed activities (which may be playful, but are not true play because they are instigated and managed by adults) and children's self-chosen play, and that learning is promoted through shared, sustained thinking and conversation.

17. *Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project* (EPPE), 2003.

It is important for practitioners to discuss provision of play opportunities with parents of children who may have different cultural attitudes to, or experiences of, play. Perhaps the best way to do this is to provide workshops with hands-on experiences, particularly of the messy play activities that are so important for babies and toddlers.

Creating the conditions for learning through play requires skilful practice and a thorough understanding of how children learn.

Case study

Jay's garden trolley

Jay, a boy of Black Caribbean heritage, attends the nursery class of a large infant school in Croydon, South London, where he also receives day care. Staff at the nursery have been keeping careful records of children's progress through observations and had noted a reluctance among boys, particularly Black and Asian boys, towards mark making and ascribing meaning to the marks they made.

The team chose four boys, including Jay, to be the focus of their observations in order to see how they could provide an environment that would improve their attitude to mark making. As well as observing the boys, the team also sought their opinions through a range of questions. Through active listening they began to draw together a strategy that took account of the children's voice.

Kay noted that when Jay was asked to write his name on his painting he replied 'No, I don't want to, but can I make a compost heap?' Rather than dismissing the comment or taking offence at his non-compliance with her request, Kay decided to see how she could build on the positive aspect of Jay's response to create opportunities that would lead to mark making and to a purpose for writing.

During their observations the staff had noted the amount of time the boys chose to spend outside and felt they would best be able to motivate the boys through working with the outdoor environment.

Further observations of the boys revealed high levels of involvement when working in the outside area, particularly when using the large brushes to paint the walls outside with water. Jay continued this activity into the afternoon session with a different group of friends – this time they happened to be girls.

They also frequently used the raised decking area where the mark making equipment was a feature of the outdoor provision. Here, they confidently made marks on the board and on paper.

Following their observations the team reflected on their outdoor provision and consulted the boys on what further resources they would like to see in the outdoor area.

Using his interest in gardening and in building, and by entering into a meaningful dialogue through sustained shared thinking, Kay supported Jay and his friends towards a solution for resourcing the outdoor area in a way that would be convenient for them and enable them to demonstrate their mark-making skills. This was driven by the children's favoured equipment, including the vital ingredients and resources for gardening and making cement, compost, roadways and signs. These motor action activities supported Jay's and his friends' mark-making development.

Together they worked out that they needed a trolley which they could move from place to place as well as appropriate tools for the garden and a garden jobs board. They also saw the value of making signs to let their friends know what was available, and this gave them an opportunity to make marks for a purpose and they did this confidently, ascribing meaning to their mark making. The children photographed each other carrying out a job and made a job sign. These photographs and signs were placed on the job board daily for all children to see and carry out. They would record their garden job in the diary each day through making representations of what they had done and found. They were then able to transfer these skills to other situations with a sense of purpose and with the enjoyment that comes with the achievement of newly discovered skills.

Pause for reflection and discussion 6

How do you use your observations to build on children's interests and extend their learning?

How do you react when children say they do not want to do something you have asked them to do?

What would you have done or said if a child would not write their name but asked instead to make compost?

How do you involve children in making decisions about their learning?

Do you react differently to some children's non-compliant behaviour than to others?

Are you more likely to 'make allowances' for the behaviour of children who you know or understand best?

How important is the key person in shaping the learning and development opportunities for Black children in your setting?

Additional examples of effective practice are available on the disc in the Learning and Development section.

Case study

'*So Much*': Illustrating an approach to CLL and PSED through the use of Creolised texts

Practitioners in a Wandsworth nursery are committed to providing a learning environment that both reflects and celebrates the diversity of linguistic and cultural heritages of the families it serves. To this end they ensure that a range of books is used where positive images of people from diverse backgrounds are presented in everyday life doing everyday things. Within that selection, texts are chosen to acknowledge the specific linguistic heritages of the children. It is not only dual texts that are available but also some stories are written in a way that particularly reflects the speech patterns of the Caribbean heritage children in the school.

Careful consideration is given to the ways in which 'Creolised' texts are used; it is felt by the practitioners that these quality texts promote Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) as well as Communication, Language and Literacy (CLL) skills.

Caribbean children's literature reflects the breadth of the Creole language continuum. Some texts contain language with a wide variation from standard English vocabulary and grammar; others are written in Creolised English with the effect being mainly on inflection and the arrangement and use of some phrases. This is demonstrated in texts like '*So Much*' by Trish Cooke.

In the story '*So Much*', members of the family gather for a surprise party. As each new guest arrives there is a focus of attention on the youngest member of the family. The story is full of repeated phrases for the children to anticipate and join in with and it is rich in the rhythmic language that reflects the Dominican heritage of the author. The children can identify with the family life represented in this text; Black Caribbean heritage children especially recognise the people in the story and the language of the characters.

In a small group, children shared the story and the practitioner used it as a starting point to talk about families and encourage children to use this as a stimulus to talk about their own experiences of family.

Examples of role-play and talk from the children's discussion after listening to and acting out '*So Much*', include:

> '…my cousins…they play with me when it's my daddy's birthday. Dom Dom's my cousin.'

> '…I've got an uncle…he's called Daniel…he plays with me and swings me around and I laugh.'

One child notices that there are lots of family members in the story and makes comparisons with his own family. Like the family in '*So Much*' he has 'lots' of family in his own home only on special occasions.

> 'My family don't got lots…when it's my birthday my family got lots.'

> 'I'm gran-gran…I'm going to squeeze the baby…squeeze squeeze squeeze.'

> 'The baby's sleeping…shhh…don't wake the baby…I'm going to shut the curtains so he doesn't wake up!'

> 'My mummy puts me in my bed and reads me a story…she gives me a kiss and she gets me a drink.'

> 'I go bed with my sister, she read (to) me den she kiss me and den she tuck me in da bed.'

One child 'crooks up' the play handbag on her arm to be 'gran-gran' and walks around the house area – 'I'm going to eat the baby'. She blows raspberries on the baby's tummy.

Children are at the table 'making' a birthday cake. 'It's the daddy's birthday, we're surprising him…my daddy had a party, he had presents and cake and we went to McDonald's.'

Another child adds – 'My daddy is in Clapham, I see him on Sundays, I live with my mummy and my sister…I have a party at McDonalds too…my daddy came.'

> 'My daddy come to my birthday an bring me present – my daddy bring me a dolly, he bring me a bicycle…it pink!'

The group add candles to the cake and begin to sing '*Happy Birthday*'.

One child suggests: 'Let's have music for dancing like in the story.'

Further information on Creole and Patois can be found in *Excellence and Enjoyment: Learning and teaching for Black children in the primary years;* and an example of Creole used in an English lesson in a primary school can be viewed on the *Building futures e-learning module*.

Pause for reflection and discussion 7

> In this case study the school has chosen to actively celebrate all children's languages by including them in planned activities. The use of Creole and Patois, perhaps more than other languages, may lead to some reflection and discussion.
>
> Do you know which children in your setting speak or hear languages at home other than English?
>
> If so, does this include use of Creole, Patois and dialects?
>
> How do you celebrate the languages of the children in your setting?
>
> Are children confident about using their home languages?
>
> What do parents feel about the maintenance and development of their home languages in relation to schools and settings? How do you know?

Learning and Development

Effective practice

Practitioners are effective when they:

- recognise that every child's learning journey is 'unique' to them;

- involve the children in learning that takes them into the local community, such as walking to the shops;

- actively listen, giving children the time they need to express themselves in different ways;

- monitor children's progress regularly, sharing findings with the children and parents and planning next steps that will engage and motivate them;

- carry out analysis of progress by ethnicity (and gender) and act upon the findings;

- review and debate equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice policy to ensure ownership and understanding.

Challenges and dilemmas

- Practitioners recognise that policies may be well intentioned but not happening in day-to-day practice.

Reflecting on practice

- What open-ended activities do you provide for children in your setting?

- How do you value what parents tell you about the way in which children behave and learn at home?

- How do you involve children in planning for their learning?

- How do you share children's learning with their parents and carers?

- How do you support children and parents in understanding learning and development opportunities when you do not share a common language?[18]

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18. See *Supporting Children Learning English as an Additional Language: Guidance for practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage*, 2007.

Appendix 1

Foundation Stage Profile (FSP) data from 2007

Children scoring lowest 20%, by ethnicity
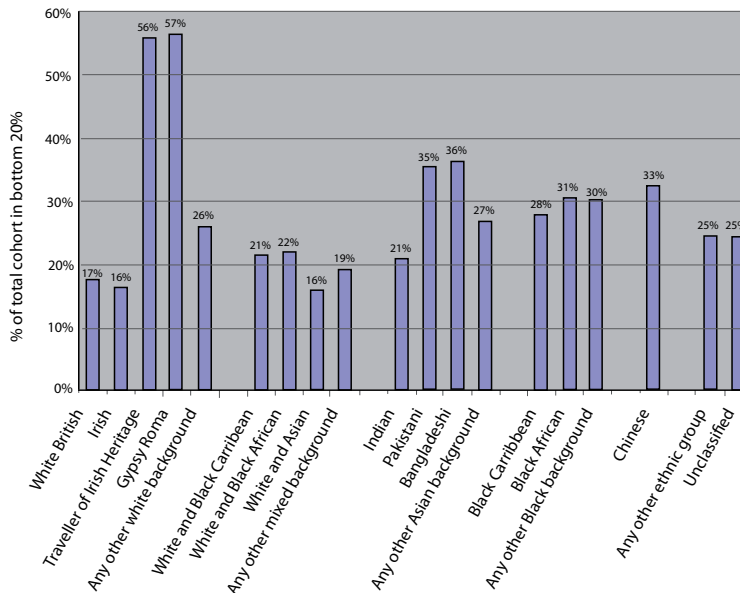
This chart shows the percentage of the total cohort in each group whose scores were in the lowest 20% nationally; for example, 26% of all Black Caribbean children were in the lowest 20% compared to 17% of White British children.

Children scoring highest 20% by ethnicity
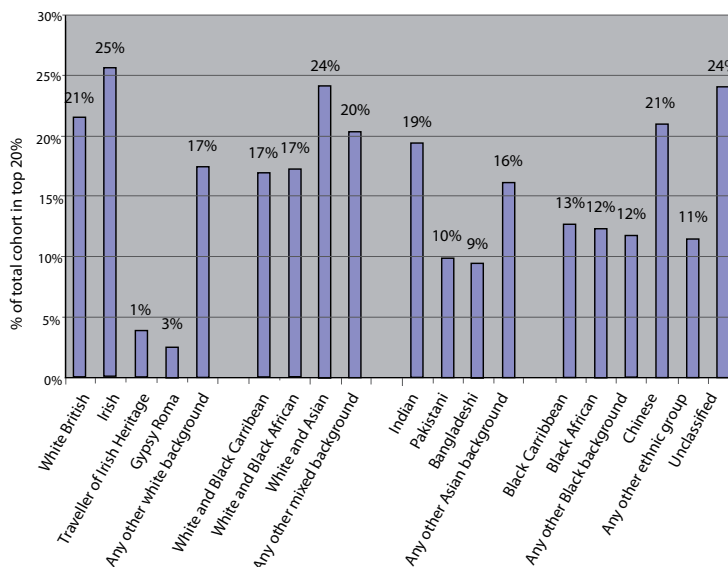
This chart shows the percentage of the total cohort in each group whose scores were in the highest 20% nationally; for example, 13% of all Black Caribbean children were in the highest 20% compared with 21% of White British children.

We can see from these graphs that there are twice as many Black Caribbean children in the lowest 20% as there are in the highest 20%.

This is the national picture from 2007 when individual Foundation Stage Profile pupil data for the whole cohort Foundation Stage Profile was analysed in this way. The picture in your school or local authority might tell a different story.

Appendix 2

Race equality

Attitudes are learned early and ingrained. We may have to search deeply for the reasons why we believe what we believe or feel what we feel; and how this affects the way we think about and behave towards other people and their children, particularly those who are from a different ethnic background. The impact of racism will be experienced and acknowledged or denied by all of us in very different ways according to our background, culture, ethnicity and colour.

Most practitioners would strenuously deny that there could be anything as ugly as prejudice or racism evident in their practice, even if it is unwitting. However, unless we all take the time to reflect honestly on our attitudes and feelings, our preconceptions and our tendencies to stereotype, then we cannot say we have given due consideration to how our thoughts about any individual or group may subtly affect our provision.

> *The denial of institutional racism – the way schools and/or local authorities as institutions exclude or discriminate against particular groups – is the single most destructive element in the education of Black children and young people.*

Maud Blair, *'Getting it': The challenge of raising Black pupils' achievement in schools and local authorities*. 2007

Low expectations of Black children by teachers and institutional racism were identified as factors influencing the underachievement of Black children in the 2003 consultation document *'Aiming High'*.

> *When we remove the factors that might cause underachievement for any child we are left with two additional factors which must be considered for Black children: the effects of institutional racism, and racial prejudice resulting from negative stereotyping, which have blighted the lives of too many families in Britain, both Black and White.*

It is too simple to dismiss the challenge of institutional racism as an irrelevance – too easy to ridicule suggestions that very young children in Early Years Foundation Stage settings could be victims of institutional racism and negative stereotyping – but too important for us to ignore.

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 places a statutory duty on schools to:

- provide equality of opportunity;
- tackle unlawful racial discrimination;
- promote good relations between members of different ethnic communities.

In schools the duties include making sure that every child has the opportunity to achieve the highest possible standards. Central to the statutory duty is a requirement to collect and analyse attainment and other data by ethnic group and to put in place strategies, including target setting and monitoring, to close gaps in achievement and attainment.[19]

> *The Government is endeavouring through a range of initiatives to reduce inequalities: through the Sure Start designated Children's Centres, its setting of targets to raise the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, and drives to increase the recruitment, career progression and retention of minority ethnic staff in all services. These are significant objectives to promote with race and multi-strand/single equality legislation and directives which seek to redress inequalities in the Education, Health, Social Care, Regeneration and Criminal Justice Systems and other sectors.*

> *Emphasis is being placed on community safety, community cohesion and inclusion. Within this context all have a responsibility to combat racism and inequalities in all its forms. In order to do this it is essential to reflect upon the past and see how the present and future is shaped by what has gone before.[20]*

19. See Appendix 3 for a checklist to support settings in writing a Race Equality policy.
20. Meleady, C., *Racism and Enslavement*, 2008.

A recent report from the Social Exclusion Unit noted that children from minority backgrounds are less likely to access childcare and nurseries (SEU, 2004). Consultation by the Daycare Trust with minority parents found again that childcare services were 'insensitive to the differing needs and perceptions of ethnic (sic) communities' (*Community Care*, 17 October 2003), with some parents reporting outright racism in relation to service delivery. The Daycare Trust has also reported more recently that Black and minority ethnic families face, at times substantial, barriers to childcare including cost, lack of flexibility and access to information (Daycare Trust, 2006).[21]

Pause for reflection and discussion 8

Do you and members of your staff team feel able to discuss race equality openly within the context of your working practice?

Have you used any kind of audit tool for race equality or minority ethnic inclusion?

The following definitions may support practitioner discussions about how the concepts of racism and racial prejudice may affect perceptions and practices and, ultimately, provision.

- **Race** is a term in everyday use – but it is a controversial term. The word comes from historical attempts to categorise people according to their skin-colour and physical characteristics. There is no scientific basis for this term and its divisions into biologically determined groups...There are some strong feelings about its usage. To indicate the controversy associated with its usage some academic articles put the word 'race' into inverted commas.

- **Racial prejudice** is a negative opinion or attitude about people of various races, based on false or inadequate evidence.

- **Racism** refers to all those practices and procedures that, both historically and in the present, disadvantage and discriminate against people because of their skin colour, ethnicity, culture, religion, nationality or language.

For other related terms to support your discussions see *Young Children and Racial Justice* by Jane Lane, published by NCB, 2008.

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21. *National Evaluation Report: SureStart and Black and Minority Ethnic Populations*, June 2007.

Appendix 3

Race Equality checklist

Although there is no statutory requirement for non-maintained settings to adopt a race equality policy, it is a requirement of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) that an equal opportunities policy be in place. It is good practice to have a clearly identifiable part of that policy which addresses race equality. The following checklist provides some suggestions intended to support practitioners in their work towards that policy development.

- Do we have a Race Equality action plan?

- Do we have a named member of staff responsible for Race Equality?

- Do we promote good relations between different groups?

- Do we have a commitment to challenge and eradicate racism?

- Do we share that commitment with parents and openly deal with racist remarks or other discriminatory behaviour, making it clear that such behaviour is not acceptable?

- Do we deal with questions about race and ethnicity honestly, sensitively and openly?

- Do we actively seek ways to counter the learning of negative attitudes and behaviour towards differences?

- Do we recognise the need for training in race equality whatever the ethnic make-up of our setting and surrounding area?

- Do we ensure all staff have access to equalities training?

- Do we welcome all families and children equally?

- Do we have accurate information about all the children in the setting, for example ethnicity, religion, naming system?

- Do we take care to spell and pronounce names correctly?

- Do we ensure that all staff have a basic understanding and knowledge of faiths and cultures to ensure everyone is catered for, including those of no faith?

- Do we ensure our curriculum includes opportunities to explore cultural and linguistic diversity?

- Do we give value to equalities education in the same way we do literacy and numeracy?

- Do we check that our resources reflect cultural and ethnic diversity and do not promote negative stereotypes, for example, ensure dolls and puppets have accurate and realistic skin tones, facial features and hair textures?

- Do we provide opportunities in the imaginative play area for children to explore a range of props from different cultures: photo albums of families from a range of backgrounds; posters portraying festivals; decorative cloths; mirrors; calendars and newspapers in a variety of scripts and number systems; cooking utensils and dressing-up clothes; and multicultural food?

- Do we ensure that we have access to a wide range of good quality books and stories – free from negative stereotypes and promoting positive role models of people from a wide diversity of backgrounds?

- Do we value home languages and regional dialects?

- Do we provide dual-language books to promote linguistic awareness and diversity?

- Do we provide opportunities for children to access the curriculum in their home language where English is an additional language?

- Do we raise all children's language awareness, for example using dual-language storytelling, taped songs and rhymes in a variety of languages, even where English is the only language spoken?

- Do we provide opportunities for children to share experiences and explore issues of fairness, tolerance and forgiveness through circle time activities, for example, using Persona Dolls as well as through play and everyday situations, drama, role-play and carefully chosen books and stories?

- Do we provide opportunities to experience diversity through visits or hosting visitors such as story tellers, musicians or artists from a range of backgrounds?

- Do we encourage parents to share their skills with staff and children?

- Do we ensure all families have access to all the activities the setting offers?

- Do we seek interpreter support for families where English is an additional language?

- Do we do everything we can to ensure all children have the opportunity to develop a positive self-identity and self-esteem and a respect for others?

Guidance for local authorities and settings is also available on the accompanying DVD.

Race Equality Checklist adapted from the Draft Race Equality Checklist © Portsmouth City Council Learning and Achievement – EMA Team 2008. Used with kind permission.

Appendix 4

Assessing the learning needs of Black children and planning for learning

Observing children is a statutory requirement placed on all practitioners in the Early Years so that they can plan appropriately to meet children's individual needs. Effective practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage entails creating the right conditions for children to develop confidence in themselves as learners, explorers, discoverers and critical thinkers.[22]

In order to do this, practitioners plan an effective learning environment; they plan what they will provide for children to experience and do and they plan their own role in nurturing, caring and supporting learning. This means finding out about each child's emotional needs, interests and passions, fears and concerns, learning styles, skills and previous experiences. It means avoiding making stereotypical assumptions and, for this to be possible, practitioners should talk to the child's parents, value their views and perspectives about their child's learning and development and their aspirations for their child. It means seeing every child as a unique individual, part of a unique family and home experience: there may be patterns and commonalities relating to culture but every family is different.

Effective planning begins with observation:

- it involves parents in collecting evidence and entering into a dialogue with practitioners about their child;

- it involves communicating with other settings or agencies the child is involved with;

- it involves collecting the views of children themselves.

22. DCSF Confident, Capable and Creative: Supporting boys' achievements, 2007.

The evidence collected from these processes, and which is analysed regularly to make assessments, is what informs effective planning for children's next steps. Under the Early Years Foundation Stage, all practitioners working with children from birth to five, including childminders in their own homes and independent schools, are expected to observe and use their observations to inform their planning. This 'formative assessment' or 'assessment for learning' process, when working effectively, ensures the child's individual learning and development needs are met. In many settings throughout the country these assessment processes work very well, but this requires an open and reflective mindset, with practitioners 'who take the time to tune into children's thinking and trust in the richness of children's ideas'.[23]

It is only by listening and observing with a truly open mind, avoiding any cultural bias, being open to the perspectives and views of others, that practitioners will plan appropriately for all children. This applies particularly to children who are most likely to experience discrimination, such as Black children. It may be that Black children's underachievement (as a group) at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage results from inaccurate assessment leading to planning that is not meeting children's needs.

> *Without observation, overall planning would simply be based on what we felt was important, fun or interesting (or all three) but it might not necessarily meet the needs of the children in our care.*[24]

In other words, without observing children, planning would be based on practitioners' assumptions and an opinion about what is appropriate, based on their own experiences and cultural background. Looking, listening, recording and thinking all require objectivity: not allowing preconceptions to influence what you have observed.

> *Many aspects of assessment practice are culture-bound. This does not matter if the assessor shares the culture of the child being assessed. This will mean that they are likely to know 'where he or she is coming from'. If the assessor does not share the cultural roots of the child, assessment might not always be accurate. When assessing children who are not from the same cultural heritage or social background as ourselves, we need to check our conclusions. At the very least this means that we interrogate assessment criteria for bias in interpretation and, when observing practice as an assessment strategy, we always check our interpretation of events or describe our conclusions with a clear statement of negotiable doubt.*[25]

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile

Assessment processes continue throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage and final assessments are made at the end of the reception year against the scale points of the 13 Early Years Foundation Stage Profile[26] assessment scales. This is the only statutory assessment for the Early Years Foundation Stage. These final 'summative' judgements are entirely teacher assessments, made on the evidence collected through the processes described above. Although there is some excellent practice documented which involves parents and the children in contributing their views, nationally there is still a long journey ahead to implement this appropriately and effectively in all primary and infant schools.

Cultural bias may affect these scores; as Gillborn points out, all assessments are liable to a cultural bias, particularly when they are based almost entirely on teacher assessment:

> *Work on assessment has long argued that teachers' views of group characteristics (such as class, gender and ethnicity) can affect the scores they give.*[27]

23. DCSF, *Confident, Capable and Creative: Supporting boys' achievements*, 2007.
24. *Effective Practice: Observation, assessment and planning,* Early Years Foundation Stage CD-ROM.
25. *Excellence and Enjoyment: Learning and teaching for Black children in the primary years*, Unit 2A.
26. *Early Years Foundation Stage: Profile handbook*, QCA, 2008.
27. Gillborn, D., *Racism and Education*, 2008.

Some Early Years practitioners are reported in Gillborn's work as suggesting that the apparent deterioration in Black children's scores may actually take place within that first year at school:

They [Early Years practitioners] report that Black students are often viewed as relatively advanced when they first enter school: they can frequently write their names and write simple sentences (a sign of the high value placed on education in minoritised households). However, it is possible that even during the very first year of schooling such positive evaluations are overridden by teachers who come to see them stereotypically as a source of trouble, while, on the other hand, their White peers have time to catch up and show what they are capable of. [28]

There are possible unintended consequences of using an assessment process that relies on practitioners' judgements. It may be that the actions and behaviours of some Black children are misinterpreted and their achievements underestimated. The underachievement of Black children later on in the system would then appear to be a continuing pattern rather than a consequence of unreliable assessment, or inappropriate conditions for learning in the Early Years.

A systematic and ongoing programme of training and thorough moderation is needed to ensure that practitioners are aware of the potential for cultural bias and are able to make appropriate assessments using the statutory instrument. Making observational assessments of children's achievements and progress is a requirement that demands a high level of skill.

Where practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage make reliable, objective and well-informed assessments of children within a context of high-quality teaching and learning throughout the Early Years, outcomes for Black children should be the same as for White children when factors such as eligibility to free school meals, special educational needs, socio-economic status, gender and English as an Additional Language are taken into account. We need to celebrate this good practice where we see it and help others develop their own understanding and improve outcomes for Black children.

Listening to parents' views in an open and egalitarian dialogue is a vital element of getting the planning right for children. *The Early Years Foundation Stage: Profile Handbook* makes it clear that there is an expectation and a responsibility to ensure that parents' views are taken into account when assessing children's achievements. This is particularly important where the cultural heritages and backgrounds of parents and practitioners differ; misunderstandings arise most often when concerns are difficult to convey in words.

The relationship with parents is crucial. Parents can help practitioners understand the different values that explain their children's responses to the environment and social situations. Children will find it easier to express their feelings and be uninhibited if practitioners listen and respond in ways that show understanding. [29]

Foundation Stage Profile (FSP) moderation

Gillborn and Mirza's report[30] prompted the Foundation Stage adviser in one local authority (LA) to look at Foundation Stage Profile moderation in a different way. Concerned that some Black children may be perceived as having lower attainment at the end of the Foundation Stage than was perhaps the case, the assessment of children with Black African and Black Caribbean heritage was made a focus for moderation in 2005–6. This action was met with some apprehension by many practitioners as it challenged their judgements at a personal level.

Assessors were asked to consider the following set of prompts to support their observations and judgements with regard to the way in which Foundation Stage Profile assessments were made during and at the end of the Foundation Stage for African Caribbean children, particularly in maintained Reception classes.

In 2006–2007 the focus group for moderation was Somali children.

28. Gillborn, D., *Racism and Education*, 2008.
29. QCA 2008, *Early Years Foundation Stage: Profile Handbook*, p 17.
30. Gillborn, D. and Mirza, H.S., *Educational Inequality: Mapping, race, class and gender - a synthesis of research evidence*, 2000.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) prompts for assessment of Black African and Black Caribbean heritage children

Please consider the following prompts to support your observations and judgements.

- Identifying achievement/underachievement of Black African and Black Caribbean children.

- Identifying any aspects within the setting that advantages/disadvantages Black African and Black Caribbean children.

- Attitudes, assumptions, expectations and ethos of setting.

- Opportunities made available for Black African and Black Caribbean parents to take part in the assessment.

- Conditions for learning – 'What is it like for Black African and Black Caribbean children in the setting?'.

- Indoor and outdoor learning environments.

- Free-flow access between the indoor and outdoor learning environments.

- Opportunity to access a range of resources independently to support their learning.

- Assessing the classroom environment.

- Rich role-play opportunities and first-hand experiences – establishing a positive climate through:
  - enthusiastic role-modelling by practitioners;
  - promoting positive adult–child relationships.

- Ensuring fair distribution of rewards and monitoring levels of sanctions and reprimands of Black African and Black Caribbean children.

- Drawing upon cultural backgrounds of Black African and Black Caribbean children to motivate and prevent disaffection.

- Promoting independent learning.

- Setting challenges involving risk-taking.

- Using children's own ideas as a stimulus to take ideas forward.

- Catering for different learning styles.

- Developing children's self-esteem and self-confidence – evidence in profiles.

- Developing a flexible approach towards planning – building in spontaneity to embrace new ideas.

- Offering multi-sensory approaches/opportunities.

- Developing children's scope to communicate to a range of audiences.

- Effective questioning and problem-solving opportunities initiated by children and practitioners. [32]

NB: All the above- mentioned prompts relate to good Early Years practice. [33]

Sometimes, particular characteristics may be revealed through the data within a specific group, so a willingness to investigate can enable practitioners to further support children's needs as in the following example.

31. London Borough of Ealing, adapted from Foundation Stage Profile moderation training materials 2005-2006.
32. Foundation Stage Profile Moderation training handout, London Borough of Ealing, as quoted in *Excellence and Enjoyment: Learning and teaching for Black children in the primary years*, Unit 2A.

Case study

Supporting children's physical development

In one inner-city local authority, the study of Foundation Stage Profile data revealed a disproportionately high number of Somali heritage children to be underachieving on the Physical Development scale. This showed up at local authority level and in individual schools. Deeper investigations revealed that a high percentage of Somali families were living in crowded conditions and without access to good opportunities for play to develop either fine or gross motor skills. Many mothers felt vulnerable and unwilling or unable to take their children to outdoor provision and were also the least likely in the borough to take up the funded places for nursery education.

In response to their findings the local authority provided outreach workers attached to the developing children's centres and also made use of a funding stream to provide accessible and safe play spaces that the families felt they could use.

One teacher who carried out her own action research project as a result of noticing low Foundation Stage Profile scores for physical development reported that this led to a far better understanding of the community and its needs.

> I've recently done a specific project with a group of Somali parents. Last year we identified that there were some physical development issues coming through and, with the rising number of pupils in our cohort from Somali families, there was this link. And we were noticing that physical development skills were much lower than the rest of their peers and we weren't sure what the connection was and why it seemed to be just for the Somali. I felt that we needed to discuss more with the parents and find a little more and probe. So I had an action-research project going on last year and met with parents. We had cooking afternoons, social times, just to get a rapport going. And I ended up finding that there was more to it than just my initial concerns about the children's development. There is actually a really vulnerable group of parents out there so our aim this year and next year is to build up the relationships with the Somali mums in our community and get them included and involved much more in our school community because they were much more isolated before and not really having a voice in the school. Hopefully, through these social occasions and bonding times, we are going to get them much more involved and hear what they think we can do for their children and hear what their needs are and where we can move things forward for their children.

Sam, nursery teacher

Pause for reflection and discussion 9

Use Foundation Stage Profile data of the previous cohort to identify whether Black African and Black Caribbean pupils are achieving or underachieving by asking:

Is attainment of Black African and Black Caribbean children at the end of the Foundation Stage in line with or above the school average?

What progress have Black African and Black Caribbean children made since entering this setting?

Are our observation and assessment skills as good as they can be?

Do we make culturally biased assumptions and judgements?

Do we know our children well enough to make accurate judgements about their progress and attainment?

What do we need to do to improve?

What actions, if any, could or have been taken?

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Recommended weblinks, websites and articles on websites

www.persona-doll-training.org – resources for practitioners including 'Persona Dolls in Action', video and support book: Brown, B. (2001) *Combating Discrimination: Persona Dolls in action*

The National Black Boys Can Association www.blackboyscan.co.uk

Early Years Equality, www.earlyyearsequality.co.uk

National Children's Bureau www.ncb.org.uk

Article by the journalist Lowri Turner about the difficulty in engaging with her mixed-race baby daughter – www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2007/jul/07/familyandrelationships.family2 A very thoughtful piece on the views and experiences of Black and White mothers of 'mixed' heritage children and the assumptions and prejudices from both Black and White family members.

Francis Winddance Twine (1999) *Bearing Blackness in Britain: The meaning of racial difference for White birth mothers of African-descent children*, *Social Identities*, 5(2), pp. 185–210

The Working Group Against Racism in Children's Resources has publications about recommended picture books as well as other resources www.wgarcr.org.uk/publications.htm

Terminology made easy! Written for young people in predominantly White areas on the Britkid site www.britkid.org/si-words.html

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Kirklees local authority

London Borough of Croydon

London Borough of Ealing, adapted from Foundation Stage Profile moderation training materials 2005–2006

London Borough of Southwark

London Borough of Wandsworth

National Children's Bureau, advice and support

Portsmouth Ethnic Minority Achievement Service – Race equality guidelines: www.blss.portsmouth.sch.uk

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